

CHAPTER 154

September 23, 2011

“Hey Maya... How you holding up?”

Justin and Maya were lounging around his house, doing pretty much nothing but drown in their sorrows and disappointment. Occasionally Justin got a phone call from one of the doctors he had called previously, or from some people one of the doctors had put him in touch with in regards to getting Maya some lessons in sign-language; but other than that, the house was dead silent. How could it not be when the only one who could speak was Justin? Even if this wasn't tragic, who exactly would he be talking to? It was true that Maya had since been carrying around a notepad to communicate with Justin when he tried to speak to her, but that wasn't REALLY holding a conversation. The two would NEVER be able to truly hold a conversation again it seemed. That's probably what was the worst part of all of this was; like there was now this barrier between them. Before they'd rib and heckle each other for hours, laughing at each other as their faces turned red with embarrassment. Now? They could never do that again; all they could do now was pass notes around, hoping to try and imitate the magic of the days gone past. Maya shrugged a bit as Justin took a seat beside her, questioning her condition. You could tell she wasn't dealing with it too well just from the look on her face; but she tried to play it off as nothing. Figures that Maya would lose her vocal cord and still worry about others before herself.

“C'mon, it's alright. You don't need to lie to me you know.” Justin prodded her, trying to get her to confide how she really felt in him. He could see right through her lies; he could see how her eyes betrayed her as she tried to play everything off as a minor inconvenience. That dull, shineless appearance to her pupils, the way her eyes seemed so focused, yet not aimed at anything at all... It was very clear that it was all she could think of. She sighed after a moment, reaching out to grab her pad and pen again, to try and speak to Justin the only way she knew how. She slowly scribbled something down before handing the pad off to Justin, so he could read the words she wanted to speak, but couldn't find the voice for. His eyebrow raised with curiosity as he stared at the crisp piece of paper, at the ink markings where her pen had scratched the surface.

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“Have I ever told you your handwriting sucks?” Justin joked only slightly. He really couldn't read this, so the fact of the matter was he couldn't actually respond to whatever it was she wrote. Maya just swiped the pad out of his hand angrily, very clearly not pleased by Justin pointing out how crappy her writing was. It was the only way she could communicate, with him, so he'd have to suck up her shitty

cursive skills. She furiously began to scribble again; this time opting not to try practicing her cursive skills and going straight to the manuscript. It wasn't like she needed to impress anyone with her calligraphy skills or anything anyway. After a moment she tossed the pad back at Justin, much more forcefully this time as she pouted over Justin's lack of sensitivity towards the issue. Justin couldn't help but chuckle a bit as he stared at the new message.

Well excuse me princess; I'll be sure to practice my curls for your reading pleasure.

"Hey, don't worry so much about it. I'm just pulling your leg." Justin choked up over his laughter. Maya sighed before sinking into the sofa a bit, her anger seeming to vanish in thin air, but still leaving a very visible effect on her as it left the shell of her soul. In retrospect, now was probably not the best time to be telling jokes, even if they all could use a good laugh about now. "I'm still waiting on a call back from that guy the doctor recommended; and then we won't have to worry about your handwriting." Justin tried to reassure her; to comfort her in the fact that she would know sign-language soon enough. Maya raised her eyebrow with curiosity, not really sure if that was supposed to be reassuring or what. If anything, the fact that she'd need to speak with sign-language from now on was horrifying, if not intimidating. I mean, it would be like learning a whole 'nother language, wouldn't it? She was afraid that it was going to be difficult to learn, that she wouldn't really be able to get it. Writing seemed so much easier; even if she knew it wasn't exactly efficient passing around a pad every time she wanted to speak. Though, having Justin translate probably wasn't much better. Maya started to scribble in the pad again, passing it back and forth between herself and Justin as they spoke; like passing notes in class.

I don't know. Sounds complicated.

Justin shook his head a bit as he read the notepad that was being thrown back and forth between the two like a flier. "From what I've heard it's not as hard as it looks. They have gestures for entire expressions and stuff. Think of it like charades." Justin tried to ease her concerns on the matter. Maya didn't seem all that convinced though. Whether it was because it still sounded so difficult to her, or because she wasn't fond of her disability being referred to as a game of charades, however, was still up for question. It was quite probable that it was both that had been chewing away at Maya's heart strings, tearing at her soul and spitting it out like a vulture pecked at the carcass of a dead coyote. "Come on, if I have to learn it, you can too." Again, more writing, more silence save the sound of pen scraping against paper filling the air. In a way, it was an unsettling noise, if only because of what it had reminded them of; of what the noise of pen scratching was substituting.

You aren't the one who barely passed seventh grade Spanish. Justin couldn't help but laugh a bit at that; which apparently was enough to warrant a slap upside the head. After all, it wasn't funny that she was stupid... N-Not that she was stupid or

anything. She was just... bilingually challenged. Yeah that's it. Justin rubbed the back of his head for a moment, trying to numb the pain of Maya's palm colliding with his skull. "Look, I'll let you copy off my test, alright?" Justin continued to joke, much to Maya's annoyance. She wasn't seeing what was so funny about all of this; about her having to change the way she spoke to the people around her. Things would never be the same again, and not necessarily for the better.

It was quiet for a moment between the two, Justin self-satisfied with his attempts at trying to lighten the atmosphere, and Maya just crossing her arms and giving him the stinker eye. She didn't need a lighter atmosphere right now, she just needed some time to think this over. If she wanted jokes, she'd turn on the television. Justin kind of caught on that she wasn't in a mood to be humored right now after a while though, and eventually toned it down a bit, his smirk fading into a frown, his smartass remarks fading away in the back of his mind. She needed someone to be there for her right now, not a clown. If she needed that, he'd call Yosuke up.

"Hey Maya, can I ask you something?" Justin suddenly spoke up, cautiously picking his words as he began to speak to her. Maya seemed a little confused as to why Justin was asking that, unless it was a really shitty question; which honestly, it probably was. She raised her eyebrow with curiosity before reluctantly nodding her head, giving Justin the go ahead to ask whatever it was that was on his mind.

"Promise you won't get upset." Justin demanded of her, still not really letting on to what he was going to ask; only that it was pretty probable that it was going to piss Maya off in some capacity. She crossed her arms, getting slightly irritated by this entire conversation before snatching the notepad out of Justin's lap again, writing down furiously on the paper; quickly, but also neatly. Partially because she stayed away from the cursive this time. It still wasn't pretty to look at, but at least you could tell what she was writing.

I can't promise that unless I know what you're going to say. Justin shook his head a bit at the pad of paper in front of him, the words striking him as slightly ironic. Oh how many times he had told Maya that exact same thing when she was about to propose one of her stupid plans; like that whole incident with the television. Perhaps this was meant to be some kind of ironic payback for all the times he had bitched her out for dragging him into another one of her shitty plans. Perhaps it was just that she felt it was her turn to bitch out Justin for saying or doing something stupid. Hell, maybe she didn't even remember all those times, and it was all just a coincidence. Justin would like to think that it wasn't that last option. Maybe he had forgotten Maya all those months ago, but now that she was back... he couldn't forget a thing about him and her. He hoped it was like that for her too, memories of their youth forever stored in the back of her mind somewhere beneath all her troubles.

"Well, uh... You don't have to answer if you don't want, but..." Justin began to speak, pondering whether he even wanted to go through with his inquiry. He knew

the moment it popped in his head that it was a question he should never ask; but curiosity got the better of him once again. By this point Maya was losing patience though, smacking Justin in the arm and shaking her hand in an attempt at kickstarting Justin's circuitry, at getting him to say what the fuck it was he wanted to ask. If she had known the question, she might have been content just sitting there watching Justin fumble over his words, debating with himself whether he was going to spit it out or not. But she didn't, and she encouraged him to ask what was probably the most inappropriate and shitty question Justin could have asked given the timing and circumstances. "Well, uh, I wanted to know... Do you regret your last words? L-Like I mean, was there anything you wanted to say, but never got the chance to? Y-You know what I... You know what forget it; this was a bad idea."

It was quiet for a moment, Maya just staring at Justin with increasingly sad eyes. If she had known that was the question, she never would have implored Justin to ask it. For a number of reasons really; the first and foremost being that she didn't want to keep talking about her disability, especially in such a negative light. The second being she had a lot of things she regretted never being able to say. A lot of them were stupid things, like being able to shout Happy New Years this year, or the next, or the one after that. Others, a lot more dear to heart, more important. Justin sighed after a moment, turning his eyes away from Maya and out towards the hallway. He was having trouble looking her in her face after that, her heartbroken expression piercing his soul like a steel tipped spear. Perhaps it was the very fact that it looked like he had broken her spirit that he was surprised to feel her fingers brush up against his leg as she snatched the notepad, deciding to answer Justin's assholeish inquiry. He turned to her with surprise, watching her scribble in the notepad with a hurt expression on her face. Clearly just writing this down was painful to her; which begged the question why was she writing it down in the first place. Perhaps she just needed to get it off her chest. Justin sighed as she threw the pad over to him, a frown slowly overcoming his face as he read what she had wrote down.

I never got to tell him I love him. Justin could practically feel his heart swallowing itself up like a black hole, melting, crumbling away as he read such a simple but powerful statement. He sighed before throwing the pad onto the table in front of him, unable to look at the words she had scribbled down without feeling tears well up in his eyes. He didn't know who it was that Maya had been talking about, but it was clear she felt passionately about him; and yet all of it was taken away from her in seconds. Perhaps there was still hope; after all, love wasn't constrained by words alone... But no matter what happened, she'd never be able to say she loved him... and that was something actions could not replicate. Justin rubbed his temples for a moment before slowly turning his eyes to Maya, just staring blankly towards the floor beneath her, head hung with sorrow. He slowly stretched his arm out to rest his hand upon her shoulder her eyes suddenly shooting over to him with surprise at the kindly gesture, but also great sorrow.

"There are other ways you know..." Justin tried to reassure her. He knew that actions wouldn't be quite the same as saying the words with your own mouth, that fuzzy sensation that caused the lips to tingle as the I word slurred against the skin. Justin could attest to that; he had shown Chie all he could, all of his love before two had ever said that they loved each other... It was a lot different. So yes, perhaps Maya could just show how she felt about the guy through actions, but it wouldn't feel the same way as just telling him. And that was something Maya seemed to understand all too well. She shook her head with disappointment, not believing anything Justin said.

"Hey, hey; look at me." Justin cut off her moment of self pity, reaching out to place his index finger under her chin, twisting her head to the side to face his. "Actions speak louder than words. It's not going to be the same thing as just telling him, I know... But that doesn't mean you can't show him how you feel." He reassured her, a gentle smile slowly creeping across his face. Maya seemed confused, averting eye contact as though deep in thought. It was probably a safe bet to assume that even if she did believe Justin, she didn't know how. How was she going to show him just how she felt if she couldn't even speak? She could barely keep her cool around the guy as it was; how exactly was she going to show him that she cared for him like that? He just didn't seem to get it, and neither did she. She eventually reached out for the pad again, scribbling down a single word, very quickly.

How? That was the question wasn't it? Even before losing her voice, it wasn't like Maya had the slightest clue how to get the guy to notice her; and now that she couldn't tell him even if she wanted to, it all seemed so... pointless. Like no matter how hard she tried, it wasn't going to work in the long run; at least, that's what Maya feared. Her new condition only seemed to cement that fear. After all, who wanted to be with a girl who couldn't even talk? Who's only means of communication was going to be a notepad and sign-language; the latter of which he wouldn't even understand? Justin stared at the pad for a moment. You'd think he was contemplating an answer to her question, but the very fact of the matter was, he already knew. In actuality, he was just thinking of how stupid a question it was. Didn't Maya know the answer had been right under her nose all along?

"Simple. Just be yourself; if he likes you back, it'll show. And when you think the time's right... Show him." Justin advised with a warm smile. Maya smile a bit in return, though it took her a moment for Justin's advise to really sink in, for her to really believe anything he was saying. It was quiet, though in that moment of silence, Maya's mouth had been moving. Justin couldn't lip-read, but it was very clear what she had been saying. A simple thank you; nothing more nothing less. A commonplace expression, usually holding no significance, no meaning other than to acknowledge someone had done the other some good. Yes, it was a rather insignificant expression that would have left Maya's lips, had she the power to do so.

And yet it meant the world to him.